

# The Stowmarket Mystery

A New Type of Detective Story by the Author of "The Wings of the Morning"

By Louis Tracy

## CHAPTER I. A Strange Crime.

WHEN David Hume-Fraser, on his second trial, was acquitted by a jury of his peers of murdering his cousin, Sir Alan Hume-Fraser, there were many people who still believed him guilty.

The case was known in police circles as "The Stowmarket Mystery." For centuries (due to an ancestral curse, so said the superstitious) the successive barons of the Hume-Fraser clan had met violent deaths, one of them on the lawn outside the family mansion, Beechcroft Hall, itself. And it was on this very spot on the lawn that Sir Alan had been found slain.

Alan had gone that evening to a New Year's Eve ball, given by Mrs. Eastham, his aunt. There he had quarrelled with his cousin David—presumably over the local vicar's daughter, Helen Layton, to whom David was engaged. The cause of the quarrel was not actually known. David himself professed to be ignorant of his cousin's reason for flying into a rage.

David had preceded the rest of the house party to the Hall and had sat down in the library by the fire to wait for Alan's return, in order to make up their quarters to the night. His own story, David had fallen asleep by the library fire. He had dreamed he saw a man in eighteenth century costume killed in a duel just outside the window, and he had been awakened by the butler, who ran in to tell him that Alan's body had just been found on the lawn, with a Japanese dagger—his neighbor—driven through his heart.

David, after his acquittal, left England. The Hall came into the possession of Alan's sister, Margaret, and her Italian husband, Signor Capella. At last, after eighteen months, David came back to England, resolved to clear his name and to take his rightful place in the world. Also to marry Helen Layton, who still loved him, although he had insisted on releasing her from her engagement to him.

As soon as he set foot in England David went straight to Reginald Brett, the famed "barrier-detector," and put the case in his hands. The barrier-detector was the more willing to accept the task, not only because he was convinced of David's innocence, but because his particular enemy, Inspector Winter of Scotland Yard, had from the first been certain David was guilty. Winter had worked on the murder case, and, in Brett's opinion, had worked very stupidly.

Brett's first move was to go to Beechcroft Hall with David and look over the scene of the crime. David was the more eager to do this since he might thus get a glimpse of Helen, who lived at the vicarage nearby.

As they entered the Hall they met Capella, then, a dapper little Italian, whom Margaret had married. He was manifestly displeased to see them. Telling them that Margaret was too ill to see visitors, he requested them to leave. They were about to do so when Margaret, looking pale and haggard, entered the drawing room.

She was undoubtedly glad to see David. And she sharply rebuked Capella for the message he had given. The Italian, in anger, left the room and the Hall. Margaret turned to David with real affection in her big eyes.

"I am ill," she said. "It is my heart. It is troublesome."

She passed out, leaving them. "What a scandal!" cried Alan, and now he wants to kill his own wife!"

"We will return later in the day," said Brett, with no comment on Alan's fierce words. "Let us go on and call on Mrs. Eastham."

"Because I want to see Miss Helen Layton. The old lady can send for her."

Hume needed no urging. He could not wait fast enough. They had gone a hundred yards from the house when Brett suddenly stopped and checked his companion.

Behind the yew trees on the left, and rendered invisible by a "cut hedge," a man was running—running at top speed, with the laboring breath of one unaccustomed to the exercise.

The barrier sprang over the strip of turf, passed among the trees, and plunged into a narrow, rutted road of horse. He came back instantly.

"There is a footpath across the park, leading toward the lodge gates. Where does it come out?" he asked, speaking rapidly in a low tone.

"It enters the road near the avenue, close to the gates. It leads from a farmhouse."

"A lady is walking through the park toward the lodge. Capella is running to intercept her. Come! We may hear something."

Brett set off at a rapid pace along the turf. Hume followed, and soon they were near the lodge. Mrs. Crowe, the lodgekeeper, saw them, and came out.

"Stop here!" gasped Brett. Hume signed to a woman not to open the gate. She watched them with open-mouthed curiosity.

The barrier slowed down and quietly made his way to the leafy angle where the avenue hedge receded, which which she left the park from the road.

He held up a warning hand. Hume stepped warily behind him, and both men looked through a portion of the hedge which their brows were suppleated by hazel bushes.

Capella was standing panting near a stile. A girl, dressed in muslin, and wearing a large straw hat, was approaching.

"Great Heavens! it is Helen!" exclaimed Hume.

Brett grasped his shoulder. "Helen Layton?" he whispered earnestly. "Luckily, Capella has not heard you. I regret the necessity which makes us eavesdroppers, but it is a fortunate accident, all the same."

Not a word! Remember what is at stake."

They could not see the Italian's face. His back was heaving from the violence of his exertion. Mrs. Layton was walking rapidly toward the stile. Obviously she had perceived the waiting man, and she was not pleased.

Her pretty face, flushed and sunburnt, wore the strained aspect of a woman annoyed, but trying to be civil.

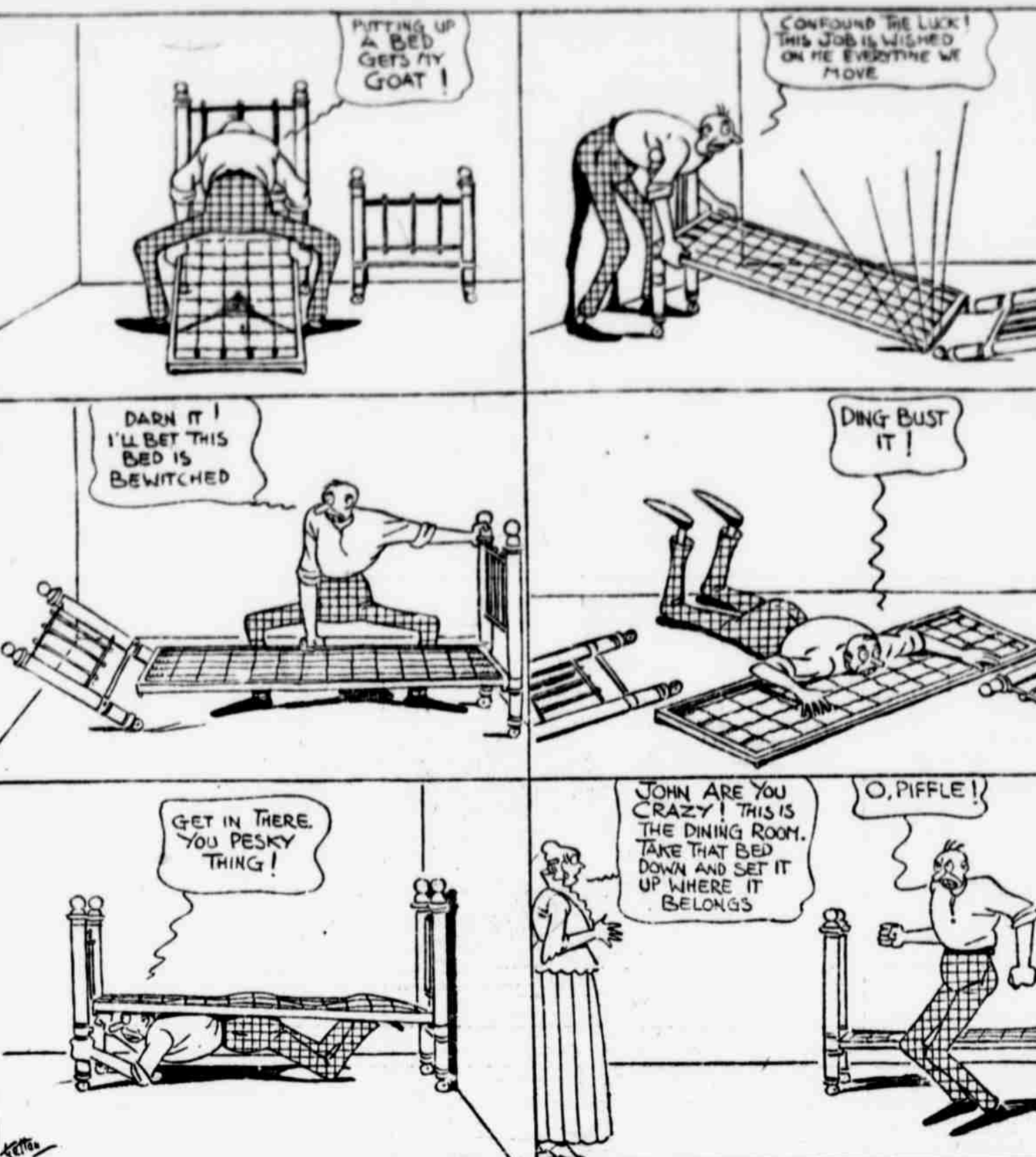
It was she who took the initiative. "Good day, Mr. Capella," she said pleasantly. "Why on earth did you run so fast?"

"Because I wished to be here before you, Miss Layton," replied the man, his voice tremulous with excitement. "Then I wish I had known, because I could have been with you easily if you meant to race me to the stile."

"That was not my object."

# The Day of Rest

By Maurice Ketten



"Then I'll obey the mistress, and master can settle it with her."

## CHAPTER II. An Old Acquaintance.

WHEN Helen had left them the barrier and David went on to Mrs. Eastham's.

The old lady welcomed David with delight. Brett told of his hopes to vindicate the younger man.

"I hope and believe you will succeed," said Mrs. Eastham impulsively. "Providence has guided your steps here at this hour. You cannot imagine how miserable that man Capella makes me."

"Why?" cried Hume, darting a look of surprise at Brett.

"Because he is simply pestering Nellie Layton with his attentions. I must speak plainly. He has some to extremes that can no longer be misinterpreted. In our small community, Mr. Brett," she explained, "though we dearly love a little gossip, we are slow to believe that a man married to such a charming woman as Margaret Hume-Fraser, would deliberately neglect his wife and dare to demonstrate his affection for another woman, especially such a girl as Helen Layton."

"How long has this been going on?" inquired Brett, for Hume was too furious to speak.

"For some months, but it is only a fortnight ago, since Helen first complained of it to me. I promptly told Mr. Capella that I could not receive him again at my house. He discovered that Nellie came here a good deal, and managed to call about the same time as she did. Then he found her as interested in Japanese art, and as he is really clever in that respect—"

"He interrupted the barrier. "Do you mean that he understands lacquer work, Satsuma ware, painting or anything? Is he a connoisseur or a student?"

"It's all Greek to me!" exclaimed the old lady, "but unquestionably the bits of china and queer carvings he often brought here were very beautiful. I could not resist him, especially, but she could not deny his knowledge and enthusiasm. Margaret, too, used to invite her to the Hall, for Miss Layton has great taste as an amateur gardener. Mr. Brett, but this friendship suddenly ceased. Mr. Capella became very strange and gloomy in his manner. At last Nellie told me that the wretched man had dared to utter words of love to her, hinting that his wife could not live long, and that he would come in for her fortune. Now, as my poor girl has been the most faithful soul that ever lived, never for an instant doubting that some day the cloud would lift from David, you may imagine what a shock this was to her."

"Mrs. Eastham," said Brett, suddenly switching the conversation away from the Italian's fantasy, "you are well acquainted with all the circumstances connected with Sir Alan's murder. Have you formed any theory about the crime, its motive or its probable author?"

"God forgive me if I do any man an injury, but in these last few days I have had my suspicions," she exclaimed.

"Tell me your reasons."

"It arose out of a chance remark

by Nellie. She was discussing with me her inexplicable antipathy to Mr. Capella, even during the time when they were outwardly good friends. She said that once he showed her a Japanese sword, a most wonderful piece of workmanship, with veins of silver and gold let into the handle and guard with such a delicate knife—a small dagger—similar—"

"Yes, I understand. An implement like that used to kill Sir Alan Hume-Fraser."

"Exactly. Nellie at first hardly realized its significance. Then she hastily told Capella to take it away, but not before she noticed that he seemed to understand the dreadful thing. It is fastened in its sheath by a hidden spring, and he knew exactly how to open it. Any person not accustomed to such weapons would endeavor to pull it out by main force."

Brett did not press Mrs. Eastham to pursue her theory. It was plain that she regarded the Italian as a man who might conceivably be the murderer of his wife's brother. This was enough for feminine logic.

Nellie did not share the same belief, and had not scrupled to express it openly.

There were, it was true, reasons in plenty why Capella should be the culprit. He had a motive, he was a man of means, and he was a man of means.

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Then a man walked up the road—a man dressed like a farmer or grunter, round, strongly-built, cheerful-looking. He halted opposite Mrs. Eastham's house, where the barrier stood, and drew out a small book.

"You are an egregious ass, Winter," said Brett, "and you are a disgrace to the name of detective."

"Why, Mr. Brett?" asked the unabashed inspector. "Isn't the make-up good?"

"It is the make-up that always leads you astray. You never theorize above the level of the police traditions."

Mr. Winter yielded to not unnatural annoyance. With habitual caution he glanced around to assure himself that no other person was within earshot; then he said vehemently:

"I tell you, Mr. Brett, that David Hume-Fraser killed Sir Alan Hume-Fraser."

"You use strong language."

"Not stronger than he deserves."

"What are you doing here?"

"I am here to see you, and to tell you what I have discovered."

"Of pure good-nature?"

"You can believe it or not, Mr. Brett. It is the truth."

"He has been tried and acquitted. He cannot be tried again. Does Scotland Yard?"

"I'm on my holidays."

"See!" he cried, "bus driver's holiday!"

"Fourteen days."

"You are nothing if not professional. I suppose it was not your first offense, or they might have let you off with a fine."

The detective enjoyed this departmental joke. He grinned broadly.

"Anyhow, Mr. Brett," he said, "you and I have been engaged on too many smart bits of work for me to stand quietly by and let you be made a fool of."

The barrier came nearer, and said, in a low tone:

"Winter, you have never been mistaken in your life. Now, attend to my words. If you help me you will be in the service. Secondly, you will be able to place your hand on the true murderer of Sir Alan Hume-Fraser, or I will score my first failure."

Thirdly, Scotland Yard will give you another case to solve, and I can secure you some shooting in Scotland. What say you?"

The detective looked thoughtful. Long experience had taught him not to argue with Brett when the latter was in earnest.

"I will do anything in my power," he said, "but there is more in this business than perhaps you are aware of—more than ever transpired at the Anizes."

"Quite so, and a good deal that has transpired since. Now, Winter, don't argue. There is a good fellow. Go and engage the landlady of the local inn in a discussion on crops. I am off to Beechcroft Hall. Mr. Hume and I will call for you on your way back to Stowmarket. In our private sitting-room at the hotel there I will explain everything."

They parted. Brett was promptly admitted by Mrs. Crowe, and walked quickly up the avenue.

Winter watched his retreating figure.

"He's smart. I know he's smart," mused the detective. "But he doesn't know everything about this affair. He doesn't know, I'll be bound, that David

Hume-Fraser waited for his cousin that night outside the library. I didn't know it—worse luck!—until after he was acquitted. And he doesn't know that Miss Nellie Layton didn't reach home from Mrs. Eastham's New Year's Eve ball, 130 A. M., though she left the hall at 12:15, and her house is, so to speak, a minute's walk distant. And she was in a carriage. Oh, there's more in this case than meets the eye! I can't say which would please me most, to find out the real murderer, if Hume didn't do it, or prove Mr. Brett to be in the wrong!"

CHAPTER III.  
Husband and Wife.

BRETT did not hurry on his way to the Hall. Already things were in a whirl, and the confusion was so great that he was momentarily unable to map out a definite line of action.

The relations between Capella and his wife were evidently strained almost to breaking point, and it was this very fact which caused him the greatest perplexity.

They had been married little more than six months. They were an extraordinarily handsome couple, apparently well suited to each other by temperament and mutual sympathies, whilst their means were ample enough to permit them to live under any conditions they might choose, and gratify personal hobbies to the fullest extent.

What, then, could have happened to divide them so completely?

Surely not Capella's new-born passion for Helen Layton. Not even a hot-blooded Southerner could be guilty of such deliberate rascality, such inhuman folly, during the first few months after his marriage to a beautiful and wealthy wife.

To adopt the hasty judgment arrived at by Hume and Mrs. Eastham, Capella must be deemed capable of murdering his wife's brother, of bringing about the death of his wife after securing the reversion of her vast property to himself, and of failing in love with Helen—all in the same breath. This species of criminality was only met with in lunatics, and Capella, however the barrier as an emotional personage, capable of supreme good as of supreme evil, but quite sane.

The question to be solved was this: Why did Capella and his wife quarrel in the first instance? Perhaps that way light might come. If Mrs. Capella would receive him, the man glanced at his card.

"Yes, sir," he said at once. "Madam gave instructions that if either you or Mr. David called you were to be taken to her boudoir, where she awaits you."

The room was evidently on the first floor, for the servant led him to the magnificent oak staircase that climbed two sides of the reception hall.

But this was fated to be a day of interruption. The barrier, who had reached the landing, was confronted by the Italian.

"A word with you, Mr. Brett," was the stern greeting given to him.

"Certainly. But I am going to Mrs. Capella's room."

"She can wait. She does not know you are here. James remains outside until Mr. Brett returns. Then conduct him to your mistress."

"I should have been told that."

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NEXT WEEK'S COMPLETE NOVEL IN THE EVENING WORLD

# THE PIRATES

By MORGAN ROBERTSON

Without any expectation of being followed by a couple of men, a young man named Capella, who had been sitting in the room, suddenly found himself alone.

"What a queer fellow!" he said, looking at the man who had just entered the room. "He is a queer fellow, but I don't know what he is up to."

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